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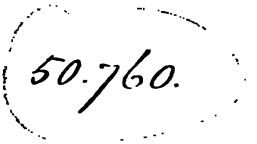
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A Poem.

By ROBERT BROWNING.

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CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY.

Christmas-Eve.

I.

Out of the little chapel I burst
Into the fresh night air again.
I had waited a good five minutes first
In the doorway, to escape the rain
That drove in gusts down the common's centre,
At the edge of which the chapel stands,
Before I plucked up heart to enter:
Heaven knows how many sorts of hands
Reached past me, groping for the latch
Of the inner door that hung on catch,

More obstinate the more they fumbled,
Till, giving way at last with a scold
Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled
One sheep more to the rest in fold,
And left me irresolute, standing sentry
In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,
Four feet long by two feet wide,
Partitioned off from the vast inside—
I blocked up half of it at least.
No remedy; the rain kept driving:
They eyed me much as some wild beast,
That congregation, still arriving,
Some of them by the mainroad, white
A long way past me into the night,
Skirting the common, then diverging;
Not a few suddenly emerging
From the common's self thro' the paling-gaps,—
—They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,

Where the road stops short with its safeguard border
Of lamps, as tired of such disorder ;—
But the most turned in yet more abruptly
From a certain squalid knot of alleys,
Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,
Which now the little chapel rallies
And leads into day again,—its priestliness
Lending itself to hide their beastliness
So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),
And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on
Those neophytes too much in lack of it,
That, where you cross the common as I did,
And meet the party thus presided,
"Mount Zion," with Love-lane at the back of it,
They front you as little disconcerted,
As, bound for the hills, her fate averted
And her wicked people made to mind him,
Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

II.

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,
In came the flock: the fat weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper
Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough,
Round to the door, and in,—the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making your very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered
Little old-faced, peaking sister-turned-mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother

Somehow up, with its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place;
She too must stop, wring the poor suds dry
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping
Already from my own clothes' dropping,
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on;
Then stooping down to take off her pattens,
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.
Close on her heels, the dingy satins
Of a female something, past me flitted,
With lips as much too white, as a streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek;
And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied
All that was left of a woman once,
Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.

Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,
With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,
And eyelids screwed together tight,
Led himself in by some inner light.
And, except from him, from each that entered,
I had the same interrogation—
"What, you, the alien, you have ventured
"To take with us, elect, your station?
"A carer for none of it, a Gallio?"—
Thus, plain as print, I read the glance
At a common prey, in each countenance,
As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho:
And, when the door's cry drowned their wonder,
The draught, it always sent in shutting,
Made the flame of the single tallow candle
In the cracked square lanthorn I stood under,
Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting,
As it were, the luckless cause of scandal:

I verily thought the zealous light
(In the chapel's secret, too !) for spite,
Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
With the airs of a St. John's Candlestick.
There was no standing it much longer.
"Good folks," said I, as resolve grew stronger,
"This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor,
"When the weather sends you a chance visitor ?
"You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,
"And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you !
"But still, despite the pretty perfection
"To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness,
"And, taking God's word under wise protection,
"Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
"Bidding one reach it over hot ploughshares,—
"Still, as I say, though you've found salvation,
"If I should choose to cry—as now—'Shares !'—
"See if the best of you bars me my ration !

"Because I prefer for my expounder
"Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder:
"Mine's the same right with your poorest and sickliest,
"Supposing I don the marriage-vestiment;
"So, shut your mouth, and open your Testament,
"And carve me my portion at your quickliest!"
Accordingly, as a shoemaker's lad
With wizened face in want of soap,
And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope,
After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,
To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,
And so avoid disturbing the preacher,
Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise
At the shutting door, and entered likewise,—
Received the hinge's accustomed greeting,
Crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,
And found myself in full conventicle,
—To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,

On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine,
Which, calling its flock to their special clover,
Found them assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

III.

I very soon had enough of it.
The hot smell and the human noises,
And my neighbour's coat, the greasy cuff of it,
Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching-man's immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,
To meet his audience's avidity.
You needed not the wit of the Sybil
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling—
No sooner had our friend an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,

(Whenever it was the thought first struck him
How Death, at unawares, might duck him
Deeper than the grave, and quench
The gin-shop's light in Hell's grim drench)
Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence,
As to hug the Book of books to pieces:
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
Not improved by the private dog's-ears and creases,
Having clothed his own soul with, he'd fain see equipt yours
So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.
And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt:
Nay, had but a single face of my neighbours
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labours
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'Tis odds but I had borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet;
Or, who can tell? had even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon:

But the flock sate on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon
With such content in every snuffle,
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor.
The man with the handkerchief, untied it,
Showed us a horrible wen inside it,
Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,
And rocked himself as the woman was doing.
The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. 'Twas too provoking!
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it,
And saying, like Eve when she plucked the apple,
"I wanted a taste, and now there's enough of it,"
I flung out of the little chapel.

IV.

There was a lull in the rain, a lull
In the wind too; the moon was risen,
And would have shone out pure and full,
But for the ramparted cloud-prison,
Block on block built up in the west,
For what purpose the wind knows best,
Who changes his mind continually.
And the empty other half of the sky
Seemed in its silence as if it knew
What, any moment, might look through
A chance-gap in that fortress massy :—
Through its fissures you got hints
Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,
Now, a dull lion-colour, now, brassy
Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,
Like furnace-smoke just ere the flames bellow,

All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through,—then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing.
Just by the chapel, a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across;
'Tis ever dry walking there, on the moss—
Besides, you go gently all the way uphill:
I stooped under and soon felt better:
My head grew light, my limbs more supple,
As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter;
My mind was full of the scene I had left,
That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,
—How this outside was pure and different!
The sermon, now—what a mingled weft
Of good and ill! were either less,
Its fellow had coloured the whole distinctly;
But alas for the excellent earnestness,
And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly,

But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,
However to pastor and flock's contentment!
Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,
With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,
Till how could you know them, grown double their size,
In the natural fog of the good man's mind?
Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps,
Haloed about with the common's damps.
Truth remains true, the fault's in the prover;
The zeal was good, and the aspiration;
And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,
Pharaoh received no demonstration
By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,
Of the doctrine of the Trinity,—
Although, as our preacher thus embellished it,
Apparently his hearers relished it
With so unfeigned a gust—who knows if
They did not prefer our friend to Joseph?

But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them!
These people have really felt, no doubt,
A something, the motion they style the Call of them;
And this is their method of bringing about,
By a mechanism of words and tones,
(So many texts in so many groans)
A sort of reviving or reproducing,
More or less perfectly, (who can tell?—)
Of the mood itself, that strengthens by using;
And how it happens, I understand well.
A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;
And when, next week, I take it back again,
My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir,
—Finding no dormant musical sprout
In him, as in me, to be jolted out.

'Tis the taught already that profit by teaching;
He gets no more from the railway's preaching,
Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I,
Whom therefore the flock casts a jealous eye on,
Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"
To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy?

v.

But wherefore be harsh on a single case?
After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,
Does the selfsame weary thing take place?
The same endeavour to make you believe,
And much with the same effect, no more:
Each method abundantly convincing,
As I say, to those convinced before,
But scarce to be swallowed without wincing,
By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,
I have my own church equally.

And in *this* church my faith sprang first!
(I said, as I reached the rising ground,
And the wind began again, with a burst
Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound
From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,
I entered His church-door, Nature leading me)
—In youth I looked to these very skies,
And probing their immensities,
I found God there, His visible power;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of that power, an equal evidence
That His love, there too, was the nobler dower.
For the loving worm within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.
You know what I mean: God's all, man's nought:
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away

As it were, an handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use His gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, "But all is God's"—whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, His own word saith, to grieve Him,
But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.
Man, therefore, stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock,
And, looking to God who ordained divorce

Of the rock from His boundless continent,
Sees in His Power made evident,
Only excess by a million fold
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.
For, see: Man's hand, first formed to carry
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry
Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain,
—Advancing in power by one degree;
And why count steps through eternity?
But Love is the ever springing fountain:
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed
For the water's play, but the water head—
How can he multiply or reduce it?
As easy create it, as cause it to cease:
He may profit by it, or abuse it;
But 'tis not a thing to bear increase
As power will: be love less or more
In the heart of man, he keeps it shut

Or opes it wide as he pleases, but
Love's sum remains what it was before.
So, gazing up, in my youth, at love
As seen through power, ever above
All modes which make it manifest,
My soul brought all to a single test—
That He, the Eternal First and Last,
Who, in His power, had so surpassed
All man conceives of what is might,—
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,
—Would prove as infinitely good;
Would never, my soul understood,
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires:
That He who endlessly was teaching,
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,
What love can do in the leaf or stone,
(So that to master this alone,

This done in the stone or leaf for me,
I must go on learning endlessly)
Would never need that I, in turn,
Should point him out a defect unheeded,
And show that God had yet to learn
What the meanest human creature needed,—
—Not life, to wit, for a few short years,
Tracking His way through doubts and fears,
While the stupid earth on which I stay
Suffers no change, but passive adds
Its myriad years to myriads,
Though I, He gave it to, decay,
Seeing death come and choose about me,
And my dearest ones depart without me.
No! love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it,
The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it!

And I shall behold Thee, face to face,
O God, and in Thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast Thou!
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, Thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,
With this sky of Thine, that I now walk under,
And glory in Thee as thus I gaze,
—Thus, thus! oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking Thee in a narrow shrine—
Be this my way! And this *is* mine!

VI.

For lo, what think you? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.

The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the west; while, bare and breathless,
North and south and east lay ready
For a glorious Thing, that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them, and stood steady.
'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colours chorded,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
Until at last they cöalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of whitest white,—
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,

Reaching in rare and rarer frequence,
Till the heaven of heavens be circumflext,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier, and flightier,—
Rapture dying along its verge!
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
WHOSE, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc?

VII.

This sight was shown me, there and then,—
Me, one out of a world of men,
Singled forth, as the chance might hap
To another, if in a thunderclap
Where I heard noise, and you saw flame,
Some one man knew God called his name.
For me, I think I said, "Appear!
"Good were it to be ever here.

"If Thou wilt, let me build to Thee
"Service-tabernacles Three,
"Where, for ever in Thy presence,
"In extatic acquiescence,
"Far alike from thriftless learning
"And ignorance's undiscerning,
"I may worship and remain!"
Thus, at the show above me, gazing
With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
Glutted with the glory, blazing
Throughout its whole mass, over and under,
Until at length it burst asunder,
And out of it bodily there streamed
The too-much glory, as it seemed,
Passing from out me to the ground,
Then palely serpentining round
Into the dark with mazy error.

VIII.

All at once I looked up with terror.
He was there.
He Himself with His human air,
On the narrow pathway, just before:
I saw the back of Him, no more—
He had left the chapel, then, as I.
I forgot all about the sky.
No face: only the sight
Of a sweepy Garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognise.
I felt terror, no surprise:
My mind filled with the cataract,
At one bound, of the mighty fact.
I remembered, He did say
Doubtless, that, to this world's end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,

He would be in the midst, their Friend:
Certainly He was there with them.
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw His very Vesture's hem.
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear,
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed
To the salvation of the Vest,
"But not so, Lord! It cannot be
"That Thou, indeed, art leaving me—
"Me, that have despised Thy friends.
"Did my heart make no amends?
"Thou art the Love of God—above
"His Power, didst hear me place His Love,
"And that was leaving the world for Thee!
"Therefore Thou must not turn from me
"As if I had chosen the other part.

" Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.
" Our best is bad, nor bears Thy test;
" Still it should be our very best.
" I thought it best that Thou, the Spirit,
" Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,
" And in beauty, as even we require it—
" Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,
" I left but now, as scarcely fitted
" For Thee: I knew not what I pitied:
" But, all I felt there, right or wrong,
" What is it to Thee, who curest sinning?
" Am I not weak as Thou art strong?
" I have looked to Thee from the beginning,
" Straight up to Thee through all the world
" Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled
" To nothingness on either side:
" And since the time Thou wast descried,
" Spite of the weak heart, so have I

" Lived ever, and so fain would die,
" Living and dying, Thee before!
" But if Thou leavest me—"

IX.

Less or more,
I suppose that I spoke thus.
When,—have mercy, Lord, on us!
The whole Face turned upon me full.
And I spread myself beneath it,
As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
In the cleansing sun, his wool,—
Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness
Some defiled, discoloured web—
So lay I, saturate with brightness.
And when the flood appeared to ebb,
Lo, I was walking, light and swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,

But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the Vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On, just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion:
What shall I say?—as a path were hollowed
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.
Darkness and cold were cloven, as through
I passed, upborne yet walking too.
And I turned to myself at intervals,—
"So He said, and so it befals.
"God who registers the cup
"Of mere cold water, for His sake
"To a disciple rendered up,
"Disdains not His own thirst to slake
"At the poorest love was ever offered:
"And because it was my heart I proffered,

" With true love trembling at the brim,
" He suffers me to follow Him
" For ever, my own way,—dispensed
" From seeking to be influenced
" By all the less immediate ways
" That earth, in worships manifold,
" Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
" The Garment's hem, which, lo, I hold !"

x.

And so we crossed the world and stopped.
For where am I, in city or plain,
Since I am 'ware of the world again ?
And what is this that rises propped
With pillars of prodigious girth ?
Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God ?
Has the angel's measuring-rod

Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,
Meted it out,—and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed?
—Binding, ever as he bade,
Columns in this colonnade
With arms wide open to embrace
The entry of the human race
To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,
Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,
With marble for brick, and stones of price
For garniture of the edifice?
Now I see: it is no dream:
It stands there and it does not seem;
For ever, in pictures, thus it looks,
And thus I have read of it in books,
Often in England, leagues away,
And wondered how those fountains play,

Growing up eternally
Each to a musical water-tree,
Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,
Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,
To the granite lavers underneath.
Liar and dreamer in your teeth!
I, the sinner that speak to you,
Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew
Both this and more! For see, for see,
The dark is rent, mine eye is free
To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
And I view inside, and all there, all,
As the swarming hollow of a hive,
The whole Basilica alive!
Men in the chancel, body, and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,
Men on the statues, men on the tombs
With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,

All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar's consummation.
For see, for see, the rapturous moment
Approaches, and earth's best endowment
Blends with heaven's: the taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin;
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Suspire in clouds; the organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed him,
(Like Behemoth when He praised him)
At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows heaven, with its new day

Of endless life, when He who trod,
Very Man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree,—
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, all in all,
King of kings, and Lord of lords,
As His servant John received the words,
"I died, and live for evermore!"

XI.

Yet I was left outside the door.
Why sate I there on the threshold-stone,
Left till He returns, alone
Save for the Garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold?—

My reason, to my doubt, replied,
As if a book were opened wide,
And at a certain page I traced
Every record undefaced,
Added by successive years,—
The harvestings of truth's stray ears
Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf
Bound together for belief.
Yes, I said—that He will go
And sit with these in turn, I know.
Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims
Too giddily to guide her limbs,
Disabled by their palsy-stroke
From propping me. Though Rome's gross yoke
Drops off, no more to be endured,
Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies:

And He, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark,
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder.
But I, a mere man, fear to quit
The clue God gave me as most fit
To guide my footsteps through life's maze,
Because Himself discerns all ways
Open to reach Him: I, a man
He gave to mark where faith began
To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet,
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the Founder's base:
He will not bid me enter too,
But rather sit, as now I do,
Awaiting His return outside.
—'Twas thus my reason straight replied,

And joyously I turned, and pressed
The Garment's skirt upon my breast,
Until, afresh its light suffusing me,
My heart cried,—what has been abusing me
That I should wait here lonely and coldly,
Instead of rising, entering boldly,
Baring truth's face, and letting drift
Her veils of lies as they choose to shift?
Do these men praise Him? I will raise
My voice up to their point of praise!
I see the error; but above
The scope of error, see the love.—
Oh, love of those first Christian days!
—Fanned so soon into a blaze,
From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,
That the antique sovereign Intellect
Which then sate ruling in the world,
Like a change in dreams, was hurled

From the throne he reigned upon:
—You looked up, and he was gone!
Gone, his glory of the pen!
—Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,
Bade her scribes abhor the trick
Of poetry and rhetoric,
And exult, with hearts set free,
In blessed imbecility
Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet,
Leaving Livy incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter!
—Love, while able to acquaint her
With the thousand statues yet
Fresh from chisel, pictures wet
From brush, she saw on every side,
Chose rather with an infant's pride
To frame those portents which impart
Such unction to true Christian Art.

Gone, Music too! The air was stirred
By happy wings: Terpander's bird
(That, when the cold came, fled away)
Would tarry not the wintry day,—
As more-enduring sculpture must,
Till a filthy saint rebuked the gust
With which he chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite
He glanced a thought above the toes of,
By breaking zealously her nose off.
Love, surely, from that music's lingering,
Might have filched her organ-fingering,
Nor chose rather to set prayings
To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.
Love was the startling thing, the new;
Love was the all-sufficient too;
And seeing that, you see the rest.
As a babe can find its mother's breast

As well in darkness as in light,
Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.
True, the world's eyes are open now:
—Less need for me to disallow
Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled,
Peevish as ever to be suckled,
Lulled by the same old baby-prattle
With intermixture of the rattle,
When she would have them creep, stand steady
Upon their feet, or walk already,
Not to speak of trying to climb.
I will be wise another time,
And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover
So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing *Lover*
Written above the earnest eyes of them;
All with breasts that beat for beauty,

Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,
In noble daring, stedfast duty,
The heroic in passion, or in action,—
Or, lowered for the senses' satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.
What! with all Rome here, whence to levy
Such contributions to their appetite,
With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, and clap it tight
On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding
On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them,—
And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present!

Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed of it,
I will rejoice that God had the preference!

XII.

So I summed up my new resolves:
Too much love there can never be.
And where the intellect devolves
Its function on love exclusively,
I, as one who possesses both,
Will accept the provision, nothing loth,
—Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.
And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,
And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist,
Who, examining the capabilities

Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion,—
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist can,
Into a perfect symmetrical man,
Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—
But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,
And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
Leaving the minds of the public to finish it,
Since cut it ruefully short he must:
On the face alone he expends his devotion;
He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,
—Saying, "Applaud me for this grand notion
"Of what a face may be! As for completing it
"In breast and body and limbs, do *that*, you!"
All hail! I fancy how, happily meeting it,

A trunk and legs would perfect the statue,
Could man carve so as to answer volition.
And how much nobler than petty cavils,
A hope to find, in my spirit-travels,
Some artist of another ambition,
Who having a block to carve, no bigger,
Has spent his power on the opposite quest,
And believed to begin at the feet was best—
For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure!

XIII.

No sooner said than out in the night!
And still as we swept through storm and night,
My heart beat lighter and more light:
And lo, as before, I was walking swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift

Of the Vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion,
—What shall I say?—as a path were hollowed,
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.

XIV.

Alone! I am left alone once more—
(Save for the Garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold)
Alone, beside the entrance-door
Of a sort of temple,—perhaps a college,
—Like nothing I ever saw before
At home in England, to my knowledge.
The tall, old, quaint, irregular town!

It may be . . though *which*, I can't affirm . . any
Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany;
And this flight of stairs where I sit down,
Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, or Frankfort,
Or Göttingen, that I have to thank for 't?
It may be Göttingen,—most likely.
Through the open door I catch obliquely
Glimpses of a lecture-hall;
And not a bad assembly neither—
Ranged decent and symmetrical
On benches, waiting what 's to see there;
Which, holding still by the Vesture's hem,
I also resolve to see with them,
Cautious this time how I suffer to slip
The chance of joining in fellowship
With any that call themselves His friends,
As these folks do, I have a notion.
But hist—a buzzing and emotion!

All settle themselves, the while ascends
By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,
Step by step, deliberate
Because of his cranium's over-freight,
Three parts sublime to one grotesque,
If I have proved an accurate guesser,
The hawk-nosed, high-cheek-boned Professor.
I felt at once as if there ran
A shoot of love from my heart to the man—
That sallow, virgin-minded, studious
Martyr to mild enthusiasm,
As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious
That woke my sympathetic spasm,
(Beside some spitting that made me sorry)
And stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, well nigh celestial,—
—Those blue eyes had survived so much!
While, under the foot they could not smutch,

Lay all the fleshly and the bestial.
Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,
Till the auditory's clearing of throats
Was done with, died into a silence;
And, when each glance was upward sent,
Each bearded mouth composed intent,
And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence,—
He pushed back higher his spectacles,
Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,
And giving his head of hair—a hake
Of undressed tow, for color and quantity—
One rapid and impatient shake,
(As our own young England adjusts a jaunty tie
When about to impart, on mature digestion,
Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)
—The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,
Broke into his Christmas-Eve's discourse.

XV.

And he began it by observing
How reason dictated that men
Should rectify the natural swerving,
By a reversion, now and then,
To the well-heads of knowledge, few
And far away, whence rolling grew
The life-stream wide whereat we drink,
Commingled, as we needs must think,
With waters alien to the source:
To do which, aimed this Eve's discourse.
Since, where could be a fitter time
For tracing backward to its prime,
This Christianity, this lake,
This reservoir, whereat we slake,
From one or other bank, our thirst?
So he proposed inquiring first

Into the various sources whence
This Myth of Christ is derivable;
Demanding from the evidence,
(Since plainly no such life was liveable)
How these phenomena should class?
Whether 'twere best opine Christ was,
Or never was at all, or whether
He was and was not, both together—
It matters little for the name,
So the Idea be left the same:
Only, for practical purpose' sake,
'Twas obviously as well to take
The popular story,—understanding
How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
Fact into fable fit for the clime,
Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it
Into this myth, this Individuum,—

Which, when reason had strained and abated it
Of foreign matter, gave, for residuum,
A Man!—a right true man, however,
Whose work was worthy a man's endeavour!
Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient
To his disciples, for rather believing
He was just omnipotent and omniscient,
As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition,—which, though it meant
Something entirely different
From all that those who only heard it,
In their simplicity thought and averred it,
Had yet a meaning quite as respectable:
For, among other doctrines delectable,
Was he not surely the first to insist on,
The natural sovereignty of our race?—
Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.
And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,

Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him,
The Vesture still within my hand.

XVI.

I could interpret its command.
This time He would not bid me enter
The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.
Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic
When Papist struggles with Dissenter,
Impregnating its pristine clarity,
—One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,
Its gust of broken meat and garlic;
—One, by his soul's too-much presuming,
To turn the frankincense's fuming
And vapours of the candle starlike
Into the cloud her wings she buoys on:
And each, that sets the pure air seething,

Poisoning it for healthy breathing—
But the Critic leaves no air to poison;
Pumps out by a ruthless ingenuity
Atom by atom, and leaves you—vacuity.
Thus much of Christ, does he reject?
And what retain? His intellect?
What is it I must reverence duly?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told
(If mere morality, bereft
Of the God in Christ, be all that 's left)
Elsewhere by voices manifold;
With this advantage, that the stater
Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity:
But how does shifting blame, evade it?

Have wisdom's words no more felicity?
The stumbling-block, His speech—who laid it?
How comes it that for one found able,
To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter?
Christ's goodness, then—does that fare better?
Strange goodness, which upon the score
Of being goodness, the mere due
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God,—should take another view
Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race! You pledge
Your fealty to such rule? What, all—
From Heavenly John and Attic Paul,
And that brave weather-battered Peter
Whose stout faith only stood completer
For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,
As the more his hands hauled nets, they hardened,—

All, down to you, the man of men,
Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock! So, you and I
Are sheep of a good man! and why?
The goodness,—how did he acquire it?
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?
Choose which; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch?
Were goodness all some man's invention,
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and where flinch,—
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong,—and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing
As graced the Alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G,—

For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital.
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality
Already known,—I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration
And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not Nature,
But Harvey, for the circulation.
I would praise such a Christ, with pride
And joy, that he, as none beside,
Had taught us how to keep the mind
God gave him, as God gave his kind,
Freer than they from fleshly taint!
I would call such a Christ our Saint,
As I declare our Poet, him
Whose insight makes all others dim:

A thousand poets pried at life,
And only one amid the strife
Rose to be Shakespeare! Each shall take
His crown, I'd say, for the world's sake—
Though some objected—"Had we seen
"The heart and head of each, what screen
"Was broken there to give them light,
"While in ourselves it shuts the sight,
"We should no more admire, perchance,
"That these found truth out at a glance,
"Than marvel how the bat discerns
"Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,
"Led by a finer tact, a gift
"He boasts, which other birds must shift
"Without, and grope as best they can."
No, freely I would praise the man,—
Nor one whit more, if he contended
That gift of his, from God, descended.

Ah, friend, what gift of man's does not?
No nearer Something, by a jot,
Rise an infinity of Nothings
Than one: take Euclid for your teacher:
Distinguish kinds: do crownings, clothings,
Make that Creator which was creature?
Multiply gifts upon his head,
And what, when all's done, shall be said
But . . . the more gifted he, I ween!
That one's made Christ, another, Pilate,
And This might be all That has been,—
So what is there to frown or smile at?
What is left for us, save, in growth,
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,
From the gift looking to the Giver,
And from the cistern to the River,
And from the finite to Infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity?

XVII.

Take all in a word: the Truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:
Though He is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him;
And were no eye in us to tell,
Instructed by no inner sense,
The light of Heaven from the dark of Hell,
That light would want its evidence,—
Though Justice, Good and Truth were still
Divine, if, by some demon's will,
Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed
Law through the worlds, and Right misnamed.
No mere exposition of morality
Made or in part or in totality,
Should win you to give it worship, therefore:
And, if no better proof you will care for,

—Whom do you count the worst man upon earth?
Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more
Of what Right is, than arrives at birth
In the best man's acts that we bow before:
This last *knows* better—true; but my fact is,
'Tis one thing to know, and another to practise;
And thence I conclude that the real God-function
Is to furnish a motive and injunction
For practising what we know already.
And such an injunction and such a motive
As the God in Christ, do you waive, and "heady
High minded," hang your tablet-votive
Outside the fane on a finger-post?
Morality to the uttermost,
Supreme in Christ as we all confess,
Why need *we* prove would avail no jot
To make Him God, if God He were not?
What is the point where Himself lays stress?

Does the precept run "Believe in Good,
"In Justice, Truth, now understood
"For the first time?"—or, "Believe in ME,
"Who lived and died, yet essentially
"Am Lord of Life?" Whoever can take
The same to his heart and for mere love's sake
Conceive of the love,—that man obtains
A new truth; no conviction gains
Of an old one only, made intense
By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

XVIII.

Can it be that He stays inside?
Is the Vesture left me to commune with?
Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with
Even at this lecture, if she tried?
Oh, let me at lowest sympathise

With the lurking drop of blood that lies
In the desiccated brain's white roots
Without a throb for Christ's attributes,
As the Lecturer makes his special boast!
If love's dead there, it has left a ghost.
Admire we, how from heart to brain
(Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)
One instinct rises and falls again,
Restoring the equilibrium.
And how when the Critic had done his best,
And the Pearl of Price, at reason's test,
Lay dust and ashes levigable
On the Professor's lecture-table;
When we looked for the inference and monition
That our faith, reduced to such a condition,
Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—
He bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,

Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it,
Which fact pays the damage done rewardingly,
So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly!
"Go home and venerate the Myth
"I thus have experimented with—
"This Man, continue to adore him
"Rather than all who went before him,
"And all who ever followed after!"—
Surely for this I may praise you, my brother!
Will you take the praise in tears or laughter?
That's one point gained: can I compass another?
Unlearned love was safe from spurning—
Can't we respect your loveless learning?
Let us at least give Learning honor!
What laurels had we showered upon her,
Girding her loins up to perturb
Our theory of the Middle Verb;
Or Turklike brandishing a scimetar

O'er anapæsts in comic-trimeter;
Or curing the halt and maimed Iketides,
While we lounged on at our indebted ease:
Instead of which, a tricksy demon
Sets her at Titus or Philemon!
When Ignorance wags his ears of leather
And hates God's word, 'tis altogether;
Nor leaves he his congenial thistles
To go and browze on Paul's Epistles.
—And you, the audience, who might ravage
The world wide, enviably savage
Nor heed the cry of the retriever,
More than Herr Heine (before his fever),—
I do not tell a lie so arrant
As say my passion's wings are furled up,
And, without the plainest Heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give this world up—
But still, when you rub the brow meticulous,

And ponder the profit of turning holy
If not for God's, for your own sake solely,
—God forbid I should find you ridiculous!
Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,
Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,
"Christians,"—abhor the Deist's pravity,—
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity,
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick 's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them.

XIX.

So sate I talking with my mind.
I did not long to leave the door
And find a new church, as before,
But rather was quiet and inclined

To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting
From further tracking and trying and testing.
This tolerance is a genial mood!
(Said I, and a little pause ensued).
One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
A value for religion's self,
A carelessness about the sects of it.
Let me enjoy my own conviction,
Not watch my neighbour's faith with fretfulness,
Still spying there some dereliction
Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!
Better a mild indifferentism,
To teach that all our faiths (though duller
His shines through a dull spirit's prism)
Originally had one colour—
Sending me on a pilgrimage
Through ancient and through modern times

To many peoples, various climes,
Where I may see Saint, Savage, Sage
Fuse their respective creeds in one
Before the general Father's throne!

XX.

. . 'Twas the horrible storm began afresh!
The black night caught me in his mesh
Whirled me up, and flung me prone.
I was left on the college-step alone.
I looked, and far there, ever fleeting
Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening Vesture,
Swept forward from my stupid hand,
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
O'er the various modes of man's belief.

I sprang up with fear's vehemence.
—Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship: let me strive
To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share.
This constitutes my earthly care:
God's is above it and distinct!
For I, a man, with men am linked,
And not a brute with brutes; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared: but should my best endeavour
To share it, fail—subsisteth ever
God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May—doth, I will believe—bring back
All wanderers to a single track!
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me—no more, can I—

It is but for myself I *know*.
The world rolls witnessing around me
Only to leave me as it found me;
Men cry there, but my ear is slow.
Their races flourish or decay
—What boots it, while yon lucid way
Loaded with stars, divides the vault?
How soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening senses' hebetude,
She turns on my own life! So viewed,
No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of providence:
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book
Unsealed to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read!
Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,

Whereby the truth from heaven slid
Into my soul?—I cannot bid
The world admit He stooped to heal
My soul, as if in a thunder-peal
Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
I only knew He named my name.
And what is the world to me, for sorrow
Or joy in its censures, when to-morrow
It drops the remark, with just-turned head
Then, on again—That man is dead?
Yes,—but for me—my name called,—drawn
As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,
He has dipt into on a battle-dawn:
Bid out of life by a nod, a glance,—
Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance,—
With a rapid finger circled round,
Fixed to the first poor inch of ground,
To fight from, where his foot was found;

Whose ear but a minute since lay free
To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry—
Summoned, a solitary man,
To end his life where his life began,
From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van!
Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held
By the hem of the Vesture . . .

XXI.

And I caught
At the flying Robe, and unrepelled
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite.
And scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
When, at a passionate bound, I sprung
Out of the wandering world of rain,
Into the little chapel again.

XXII.

How else was I found there, bolt upright
On my bench, as if I had never left it?
—Never flung out on the common at night
Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,
Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
Or the laboratory of the Professor!
For the Vision, *that* was true, I wist,
True as that heaven and earth exist.
There sate my friend, the yellow and tall,
With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place;
Yet my nearest neighbour's cheek showed gall,
She had slid away a contemptuous space:
And the old fat woman, late so placable,
Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakeable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid:
In short a spectator might have fancied

That I had nodded betrayed by a slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
To wake up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such a disgrace have happened?
Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it;
And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end?
Unless I heard it, could I have judged it?
Could I report as I do at the close,
First, the preacher speaks through his nose:
Second, his gesture is too emphatic:
Thirdly, to waive what 's pedagogic,
The subject-matter itself lacks logic:
Fourthly, the English is ungrammatic.
Great news! the preacher is found no Pascal,
Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call
Of making square to a finite eye
The circle of infinity,

And find so all-but-just-succeeding!

Great news! the sermon proves no reading

Where bee-like in the flowers I may bury me,

Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy!

And now that I know the very worst of him,

What was it I thought to obtain at first of him?

Ha! Is God mocked, as He asks?

Shall I take on me to change His tasks,

And dare, despatched to a river-head

For a simple draught of the element,

Neglect the thing for which He sent,

And return with another thing instead?—

Saying . . "Because the water found

"Welling up from underground,

"Is mingled with the taints of earth,

"While Thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,

"And couldest, at a word, convulse

"The world with the leap of its river-pulse,—

"Therefore I turned from the oozings muddy,
"And bring thee a chalice I found, instead:
"See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy!
"One would suppose that the marble bled.
"What matters the water? A hope I have nursed,
"That the waterless cup will quench my thirst."
—Better have knelt at the poorest stream
That trickles in pain from the straitest rift!
For the less or the more is all God's gift,
Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.
And here, is there water or not, to drink?
I, then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God's help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
This mode of worship, as most to His mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
His All in All appears serene,
With the thinnest human veil between,

Letting the mystic Lamps, the Seven,
The many motions of His spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from Heaven.
For the preacher's merit or demerit,
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters!—
Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,
This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort, can I doubt,
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.
May it be mine! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befal the Pope,
Turn'd sick at last of the day's buffoonery,
Of his posturings and his petticoatings,

Beside the Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery!
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen, presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,
Prophesied of by that horrible husk;
And when, thicker and thicker, the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles,
And he gropes for something more substantial
Than a fable, myth, or personification,
May Christ do for him, what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of salvation!
Meantime, in the still recurring fear
Lest myself, at unawares, be found,
While attacking the choice of my neighbours round,
Without my own made—I choose here!
The giving out of the hymn reclaims me;
I have done!—And if any blames me,

Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
The topics I dwell on, were unlawful,—
Or, worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
On the bounds of the Holy and the awful,
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
And refer myself to THEE, instead of him;
Who head and heart alike discernest,
Looking below light speech we utter,
When the frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!
May the truth shine out, stand ever before us!
I put up pencil and join chorus
To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
The last five verses of the third section
Of the seventeenth hymn in Whitfield's Collection,
To conclude with the doxology.

Easter-Day.

I.

How very hard it is to be
A Christian! Hard for you and me,
—Not the mere task of making real
That duty up to its ideal,
Effecting thus, complete and whole,
A purpose of the human soul—
For that is always hard to do;
But hard, I mean, for me and you
To realise it, more or less,
With even the moderate success

Which commonly repays our strife
To carry out the aims of life.
"This aim is greater," you may say,
"And so more arduous every way."
—But the importance of the fruits
Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
Proportional encouragement.
"Then, what if it be God's intent
"That labour to this one result
"Shall seem unduly difficult?"
—Ah, that 's a question in the dark—
And the sole thing that I remark
Upon the difficulty, this;
We do not see it where it *is*,
At the beginning of the race:
As we proceed, it shifts its place,
And where we looked for palms to fall,
We find the tug 's to come,—that 's all.

II.

At first you say, "The whole, or chief
"Of difficulties, is Belief.
"Could I believe once thoroughly,
"The rest were simple. What? Am I
"An idiot, do you think? A beast?
"Prove to me only that the least
"Command of God is God's indeed,
"And what injunction shall I need
"To pay obedience? Death so nigh
"When time must end, eternity
"Begin,—and cannot I compute?
"Weigh loss and gain together? suit
"My actions to the balance drawn,
"And give my body to be sawn
"Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied
"To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,

"Like any martyr of the list?
"How gladly,—if I made acquist,
"Through the brief minutes' fierce annoy,
"Of God's eternity of joy."

III.

—And certainly you name the point
Whereon all turns: for could you joint
This flexile finite life once tight
Into the fixed and infinite,
You, safe inside, would spurn what's out,
With carelessness enough, no doubt—
Would spurn mere life: but where time brings
To their next stage your reasonings,
Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
Nor see the path so well, I think.

IV.

You say, "Faith may be, one agrees,
"A touchstone for God's purposes,
"Even as ourselves conceive of them.
"Could He acquit us or condemn
"For holding what no hand can loose,
"Rejecting when we can't but choose?
"As well award the victor's wreath
"To whosoever should take breath
"Duly each minute while he lived—
"Grant Heaven, because a man contrived
"To see the sunlight every day
"He walked forth on the public way.
"You must mix some uncertainty
"With faith, if you would have faith *be*.
"Why, what but faith, do we abhor
"And idolize each other for—

" —Faith in our evil, or our good,
" Which is or is not understood
" Aright by those we love or those
" We hate, thence called our friends or foes?
" Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,
" When, turning from the ugly face,
" I found belief in it too hard;
" And both of us have our reward.
" —Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
" Weak beings, to go using thus
" A touchstone for our little ends,
" And try with faith the foes and friends;
" —But God, bethink you! I would fain
" Conceive of the Creator's reign
" As based upon exacter laws
" Than creatures build by with applause.
" In all God's acts—(as Plato cries
" He doth)—He *should* geometrise.
" Whence, I desiderate . . ."

v.

I see!

You would grow smoothly as a tree,
Soar heavenward, straightly up like fire—
God bless you—there 's your world entire
Needing no faith, if you think fit;
Go there, walk up and down in it!
The whole creation travails, groans—
Contrive your music from its moans,
Without or let or hindrance, friend!
That 's an old story, and its end
As old—you come back (be sincere)
With every question you put here
(Here where there once was, and is still,
We think, a living oracle,
Whose answers you stood carping at)
This time flung back unanswered flat,—

Besides, perhaps, as many more
As those that drove you out before,
Now added, where was little need!
Questions impossible, indeed,
To us who sate still, all and each
Persuaded that our earth had speech
Of God's, writ down, no matter if
In cursive type or hieroglyph,—
Which one fact frees us from the yoke
Of guessing why He never spoke.
You come back in no better plight
Than when you left us,—am I right?

VI.

So the old process, I conclude,
Goes on, the reasoning's pursued
Further. You own, "Tis well averred,
"A scientific faith's absurd,

" —Frustrates the very end 'twas meant
" To serve: so I would rest content
" With a mere probability,
" But, probable; the chance must lie
" Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,
" So long as there is just enough
" To pin my faith to, though it hap
" Only at points: from gap to gap
" One hangs up a huge curtain so,
" Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
" Foldless and flat along the wall:
" —What care I that some interval
" Of life less plainly might depend
" On God? I'd hang there to the end;
" And thus I should not find it hard
" To be a Christian and debarred
" From trailing on the earth, till furled
" Away by death!—Renounce the world?

"Were that a mighty hardship? Plan
"A pleasant life, and straight some man
"Beside you, with, if he thought fit,
"Abundant means to compass it,
"Shall turn deliberate aside
"To try and live as, if you tried
"You clearly might, yet most despise.
"One friend of mine wears out his eyes,
"Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
"In patient hope that, ten years hence,
"Somewhat completer he may see
"His list of *lepidopteræ*:
"While just the other who most laughs
"At him, above all epitaphs
"Aspires to have his tomb describe
"Himself as Sole among the tribe
"Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed
"A Grignon with the Regent's crest.

"So that, subduing as you want,
"Whatever stands predominant
"Among my earthly appetites
"For tastes, and smells, and sounds, and sights,
"I shall be doing that alone,
"To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
"Which fifty people undertake
"To do, and gladly, for the sake
"Of giving a Semitic guess,
"Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

VII.

Good! and the next thing is,—look round
For evidence enough. 'Tis found,
No doubt: as is your sort of mind,
So is your sort of search—you 'll find
What you desire, and that 's to be
A Christian: what says History?

How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy-scrap declare
There lived a Moses! Better still,
Prove Jonah's whale translatable
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That Faith might clap her wings and crow
From such an eminence! Or, no—
The Human Heart's best; you prefer
Making that prove the minister
To truth; you probe its wants and needs
And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
Meet these most aptly,—resolute
That Faith plucks such substantial fruit
Wherever these two correspond,
She little needs to look beyond,
To puzzle out what Orpheus was,
Or Dionysius Zagrias.

You 'll find sufficient, as I say,
To satisfy you either way.
You wanted to believe; your pains
Are crowned—you do: and what remains?
Renounce the world!—Ah, were it done
By merely cutting one by one
Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
How easy were it!—how soon past,
If once in the believing mood!
Such is man's usual gratitude,
Such thanks to God do we return,
For not exacting that we spurn
A single gift of life, forego
One real gain,—only taste them so
With gravity and temperance,
That those mild virtues may enhance
Such pleasures, rather than abstract—
Last spice of which, will be the fact

Of love discerned in every gift;
While, when the scene of life shall shift,
And the gay heart be taught to ache,
As sorrows and privations take
The place of joy,—the thing that seems
Mere misery, under human schemes,
Becomes, regarded by the light
Of Love, as very near, or quite
As good a gift as joy before.
So plain is it that all the more
God's dispensation's merciful,
More pettishly we try and cull
Briars, thistles, from our private plot,
To mar God's ground where thorns are not!

VIII.

Do you say this, or I?—Oh, you!
Then, what, my friend,—(so I pursue

Our parley)—you indeed opine
That the Eternal and Divine
Did, eighteen centuries ago,
In very truth . . . Enough! you know
The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,
That Life, that Death! And all, the earth
Shuddered at,—all, the heavens grew black
Rather than see; all, Nature's rack
And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested,—it took place, you think,
Only to give our joys a zest,
And prove our sorrows for the best?
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed,
Apart from other sins,—concede

That if He blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 'twere not
So very disproportionate!
Or there might be another fate—
I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that Day's price,
The impure in their impurities,
Leave formal licence and complete
To choose the fair, and pick the sweet.
But there be certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again,
Hard to mistake, to overgloss—
Announcing this world's gain for loss,
And bidding us reject the same:
The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
In wickedness,—come out of it!—
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,

But I who thrill through every nerve
At thought of what deaf ears deserve,—
How do you counsel in the case?

IX.

"I'd take, by all means, in your place,
"The safe side, since it so appears:
"Deny myself, a few brief years,
"The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
"Or cut the plant up by the root.
"Remember what a martyr said
"On the rude tablet overhead—
"'I was born sickly, poor and mean,
"'A slave: no misery could screen
"'The holders of the pearl of price
"'From Cæsar's envy; therefore twice
"'I fought with beasts, and three times saw
"'My children suffer by his law—

" ' At last my own release was earned:
" ' I was some time in being burned,
" ' But at the close a Hand came through
" ' The fire above my head, and drew
" ' My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
" ' Sergius, a brother, writes for me
" ' This testimony on the wall—
" ' For me, I have forgot it all.'
" You say right; this were not so hard!
" And since one nowise is debarred
" From this, why not escape some sins
" By such a method?"

X.

—Then begins
To the old point, revulsion new—
(For 'tis just this, I bring you to)
If after all we should mistake,

[illegible]

So, the contemner we contemn,—
And, when doubt strikes us, so, we ward
Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,
—Not struck enough to overturn
Our faith, but shake it—make us learn
What I began with, and, I wis,
End, having proved,—how hard it is
To be a Christian!

XI.

"Proved, or not,
"Howe'er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
"You get of mine, for taking pains
"To make it hard to me. Who gains
"By that, I wonder? Here I live
"In trusting ease; and do you drive
"At causing me to lose what most
"Yourself would mourn for when 'twas lost?"

XII.

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
You leave St. Paul for Æschylus?—
—Who made his Titan's arch-device
The giving men *blind hopes* to spice
The meal of life with, else devoured
In bitter haste, while lo! Death loured
Before them at the platter's edge!
If faith should be, as we allege,
Quite other than a condiment
To heighten flavors with, or meant
(Like that brave curry of his Grace)
To take at need the victuals' place?
If having dined you would digest
Besides, and turning to your rest
Should find instead . . .

XIII.

Now, you shall see
And judge if a mere foppery
Pricks on my speaking! I resolve
To utter . . yes, it shall devolve
On you to hear as solemn, strange
And dread a thing as in the range
Of facts,—or fancies, if God will—
E'er happened to our kind! I still
Stand in the cloud, and while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak, perhaps;
Seeing that as I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find veritable listeners,
My story, reason's self avers
Must needs be false—the happy chance!
While, if each human countenance

I meet in London streets all day,
Be what I fear,—my warnings fray
No one, and no one they convert,
And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story!

XIV.

I commence
By trying to inform you, whence
It comes that every Easter-night
As now, I sit up, watch, till light
Shall break, those chimney-stacks and roofs
Give, through my window-pane, grey proofs
That Easter-day is breaking slow.
On such a night, three years ago,
It chanced that I had cause to cross

The common, where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day—
You 've not forgotten, I dare say.
I fell to musing of the time
So close, the blessed matin-prime
All hearts leap up at, in some guise—
One could not well do otherwise.
Insensibly my thoughts were bent
Toward the main point; I overwent
Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now: one thing
Remained, however—one that tasked
My soul to answer; and I asked,
Fairly and frankly, what might be
That History, that Faith, to me—
—Me there—not me, in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain,
Weighing its merits as one weighs

Mere theories for blame or praise,
—The Kingcraft of the Lucumons,
Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—
But as *my* faith, or none at all.
'How were my case, now, should I fall
'Dead here, this minute—do I lie
'Faithful or faithless?'—Note that I
Inclined thus ever!—little prone
For instance, when I slept alone
In childhood, to go calm to sleep
And leave a closet where might keep
His watch perdue some murderer
Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,
As good, authentic legends tell
He might—'But how improbable!
'How little likely to deserve
'The pains and trial to the nerve
'Of thrusting head into the dark,'—

Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark
Besides, that, should the dreadful scout
Really lie hid there, to leap out
At first turn of the rusty key,
It were small gain that she could see
In being killed upon the floor
And losing one night's sleep the more.
I tell you, I would always burst
The door ope, know my fate at first.—
This time, indeed, the closet penned
No such assassin: but a friend
Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
For counsel, Common Sense, to-wit,
Who said a good deal that might pass,—
Heartening, impartial too, it was,
Judge else: 'For, soberly now,—who
'Should be a Christian if not you?'
(Hear how he smoothed me down). 'One takes

'A whole life, sees what course it makes
'Mainly, and not by fits and starts—
'In spite of stoppage which imparts
'Fresh value to the general speed:
'A life, with none, would fly indeed:
'Your progressing is slower—right!
'We deal with progressing, not flight.
'Through baffling senses passionate,
'Fancies as restless,—with a freight
'Of knowledge cumbersome enough
'To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
'Not serve as ballast in the hold,
'I find, 'mid dangers manifold,
'The good bark answers to the helm
'Where Faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm
'Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,
'Whose hard head could not, if it tried,
'Conceive a doubt, or understand

'How senses hornier than his hand
'Should 'tice the Christian off his guard—
'More happy! But shall we award
'Less honor to the hull, which, dogged
'By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
'Masts by the board, and bulwarks gone,
'And stanchions going, yet bears on,—
'Than to mere life-boats, built to save,
'And triumph o'er the breaking wave?
'Make perfect your good ship as these,
'And what were her performances!'
I added—'Would the ship reached home!
'I wish indeed "God's kingdom come—"
'The day when I shall see appear
'His bidding, as my duty, clear
'From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,
'Some future season; Easter may
'Prove, not impossibly, the time—

'Yes, that were striking—fates would chime
'So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring
'The Judgment!—deeper in the Spring
'Than now, however, when there 's snow
'Capping the hills; for earth must show
'All signs of meaning to pursue
'Her tasks as she was wont to do—
'—The lark, as taken by surprise
'As we ourselves, shall recognise
'Sudden the end: for suddenly
'It comes—the dreadfulness must be
'In that—all warrants the belief—
'"At night it cometh like a thief."
'I fancy why the trumpet blows;
'—Plainly, to wake one. From repose
'We shall start up, at last awake
'From life, that insane dream we take
'For waking now, because it seems.

'And as, when now we wake from dreams,
'We say, while we recall them, "Fool,
'"To let the chance slip, linger cool
'"When such adventure offered! Just
'"A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
'"Aside, a wicked mage to stab—
'"And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab,"—
'So shall we marvel why we grudged
'Our labours here, and idly judged
'Of Heaven, we might have gained, but lose!
'Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
'To plead at all! I speak no worse
'Nor better than my ancient nurse
'When she would tell me in my youth
'I well deserved that shapes uncouth
'Should fright and tease me in my sleep—
'Why did I not in memory keep
'Her precept for the evil's cure?

'"Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure
'"You'll wake forthwith!"'

XV.

And as I said
This nonsense, throwing back my head
With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of Heaven had stood
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) 'There—
'Burn it!' And straight I was aware

That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
As fanned to measure equable,—
As when great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct could trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network—then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,
Regorged, and out it surging flew
Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed

No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly, on every side,
Caught past escape; the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed;
Then, as he winced at his Lord's goad,
Back he inhaled: whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top: a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world.

XVI.

I felt begin
The Judgment-Day: to retrocede

Was too late now.—'In very deed,
(I uttered to myself) 'that Day!'
The intuition burned away
All darkness from my spirit too—
There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made—
And naked and disguiseless stayed,
And unevadeable, the fact.
My brain held ne'ertheless compact
Its senses, nor my heart declined
Its office—rather, both combined
To help me in this juncture—I
Lost not a second,—agony
Gave boldness: there, my life had end
And my choice with it—best defend,
Applaud them! I resolved to say,
'So was I framed by Thee, this way
'I put to use Thy senses here!

'It was so beautiful, so near,
'Thy world,—what could I do but choose
'My part there? Nor did I refuse
'To look above the transient boon
'In time—but it was hard so soon
'As in a short life, to give up
'Such beauty: I had put the cup
'Undrained of half its fulness, by;
'But, to renounce it utterly,
'—That was too hard! Nor did the Cry
'Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
'Authentically deep and plain
'Enough, to make my lips let go.
'But Thou, who knowest all, dost know
'Whether I was not, life's brief while,
'Endeavouring to reconcile
'Those lips—too tardily, alas!
'To letting the dear remnant pass,

'One day,—some drops of earthly good
'Untasted! Is it for this mood,
'That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
'Hast made its complement a Hell?'

XVII.

A final belch of fire like blood,
Overbroke all, next, in one flood
Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
Was fire, and both, one extacy,
Then ashes. But I heard no noise
(Whatever was) because a Voice
Beside me spoke thus, "All is done,
"Time ends, Eternity's begun,
"And thou art judged for evermore!"

XVIII.

I looked up; all was as before;

Of that cloud-Tophet overhead,
No trace was left: I saw instead
The common round me, and the sky
Above, stretched drear and emptily
Of life: 'twas the last watch of night,
Except what brings the morning quite,
When the armed angel, conscience-clear
His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
And gazes on the earth he guards,
Safe one night more through all its wards,
Till God relieve him at his post.
'A dream—a waking dream at most!'
(I spoke out quick that I might shake
The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)
'The world's gone, yet the world is here?
'Are not all things as they appear?
'Is Judgment past for me alone?
'—And where had place the Great White Throne?

'The rising of the Quick and Dead?
'Where stood they, small and great? Who read
'The sentence from the Opened Book?'
So, by degrees, the blood forsook
My heart, and let it beat afresh:
I knew I should break through the mesh
Of horror, and breathe presently—
When, lo, again, the Voice by me!

XIX.

I saw . . . Oh, brother, 'mid far sands
The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,—
Bright-white beneath, as Heaven, bright-blue,
Above it, while the years pursue
Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisal laugh at fate:
One morn,—the Arab staggers blind
O'er a new tract of death, calcined

To ashes, silence, nothingness,—
Striving, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow: what if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise
The imaged Vapour, head to foot,
Surveying, motionless and mute,
Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt,
It vanish up again?—So hapt
My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke
Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—
I saw Him. One magnific pall
Mantled in massive fold and fall
His Dread, and coiled in snaky swathes
About His feet: night's black, that bathes
All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
Against the soul of blackness there.
A gesture told the mood within—
That wrapped right hand which based the chin,—

That intense meditation fixed
On His procedure,—pity mixed
With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
Who fell before His feet, a mass,
No man now.

XX.

" All is come to pass.
" Such shows are over for each soul
" They had respect to. In the roll
" Of Judgment which convinced mankind
" Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,
" Terror must burn the truth into:
" Their fate for them !—thou had'st to do
" With absolute omnipotence,
" Able its judgments to dispense
" To the whole race, as every one

" Were its sole object: that is done:
" God is, thou art,—the rest is hurled
" To nothingness for thee. This world,
" This finite life, thou hast preferred,
" In disbelief of God's own word,
" To Heaven and to Infinity.
" Here, the probation was for thee,
" To show thy soul the earthly mixed
" With Heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
" The earthly joys lay palpable,—
" A taint, in each, distinct as well;
" The Heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
" Above them, but as truly were
" Taintless, so in their nature, best.
" Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
" 'Twas fitter spirit should subserve
" The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
" Beneath the spirit's play. Advance

"No claim to their inheritance
"Who chose the spirit's fugitive
"Brief gleams, and thought, 'This were to live
"'Indeed, if rays, completely pure
"'From flesh that dulls them, should endure,—
"'Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
"'Our earth, to show how cold and swart
"'It lies beneath their fire, but stand
"'As stars should, destined to expand,
"'Prove veritable worlds, our home!'
"Thou said'st,—'Let Spirit star the dome
"'Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,
"'No nook of earth,—I shall not seek
"'Its service further!' Thou art shut
"Out of the Heaven of Spirit; glut
"Thy sense upon the world: 'tis thine
"For ever—take it!"

XXI.

'How? Is mine,
'The world?' (I cried, while my soul broke
Out in a transport) 'Hast Thou spoke
'Plainly in that? Earth's exquisite
'Treasures of wonder and delight,
'For me?'

XXII.

The austere Voice returned,—
"So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
"What God accounteth happiness,
"Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
"What Hell may be His punishment
"For those who doubt if God invent
"Better than they. Let such men rest
"Content with what they judged the best.

"Let the Unjust usurp at will:
"The Filthy shall be filthy still:
"Miser, there waits the gold for thee!
"Hater, indulge thine enmity!
"And thou, whose heaven, self-ordained,
"Was to enjoy earth unrestrained,
"Do it! Take all the ancient show!
"The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
"And men apparently pursue
"Their works, as they were wont to do,
"While living in probation yet:
"I promise not thou shalt forget
"The past, now gone to its account,
"But leave thee with the old amount
"Of faculties, nor less nor more,
"Unvisited, as heretofore,
"By God's free spirit, that makes an end.
"So, once more, take thy world; expend

"Eternity upon its shows,—
"Flung thee as freely as one rose
"Out of a summer's opulence,
"Over the Eden-barrier whence
"Thou art excluded. Knock in vain!"

XXIII.

I sate up. All was still again.
I breathed free: to my heart, back fled
The warmth. 'But, all the world!' (I said)
I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts
Exist, if one may trust reports,
Each as distinct and beautiful
As this, the very first I cull.
Think, from the first leaf to the last!
Conceive, then, earth's resources! Vast

Exhaustless beauty, endless change
Of wonder! and this foot shall range
Alps, Andes,—and this eye devour
The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

XXIV.

And the Voice, "Welcome so to rate
"The arras-folds that variegate
"The earth, God's antechamber, well!
"The wise, who waited there, could tell
"By these, what royalties in store
"Lay one step past the entrance-door.
"For whom, was reckoned, not too much,
"This life's munificence? For such
"As thou,—a race, whereof not one
"Was able, in a million,
"To feel that any marvel lay
"In objects round his feet all day;

" Nor one, in many millions more,
" Willing, if able, to explore
" The secreter, minuter charm!
" —Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm
" Of power to cope with God's intent,—
" Or scared if the South Firmament
" With North-fire did its wings refledge!
" All partial beauty was a pledge
" Of beauty in its plenitude:
" But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
" Retain it—plenitude be theirs
" Who looked above!"

XXV.

Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
'What is it though my trust is gone
'From natural things? Henceforth my part

'Be less with Nature than with Art!
'For Art supplants, gives mainly worth
'To Nature; 'tis Man stamps the earth—
'And I will seek his impress, seek
'The statuary of the Greek,
'Italy's painting—there my choice
'Shall fix!'

XXVI.

"Obtain it," said the Voice.
"The one form with its single act,
"Which sculptors labored to abstract,
"The one face, painters tried to draw,
"With its one look, from throngs they saw!
"And that perfection in their soul,
"These only hinted at? The whole,
"They were but parts of? What each laid
"His claim to glory on?—afraid

" His fellow-men should give him rank
" By the poor tentatives he shrank
" Smitten at heart from, all the more,
" That gazers pressed in to adore!
" 'Shall I be judged by only these?'
" If such his soul's capacities,
" Even while he trod the earth,—think, now
" What pomp in Buonarotti's brow,
" With its new palace-brain where dwells
" Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
" That crumbled with the transient clay!
" What visions will his right hand's sway
" Still turn to form, as still they burst
" Upon him? How will he quench thirst,
" Titanically infantine,
" Laid at the breast of the Divine?
" Does it confound thee,—this first page
" Emblazoning man's heritage?—

"Can this alone absorb thy sight,
"As if they were not infinite,—
"Like the omnipotence which tasks
"Itself, to furnish all that asks
"The soul it means to satiate?
"What was the world, the starry state
"Of the broad skies,—what, all displays
"Of power and beauty intermixed,
"Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—
"What, else, than needful furniture
"For life's first stage? God's work, be sure,
"No more spreads wasted, than falls scant:
"He filled, did not exceed, Man's want
"Of beauty in this life. And pass
"Life's line,—and what has earth to do,
"Its utmost beauty's appanage,
"With the requirements of next stage?
"Did God pronounce earth 'very good'?

" Needs must it be, while understood
" For man's preparatory state;
" Nothing to heighten nor abate:
" But transfer the completeness here,
" To serve a new state's use,—and drear
" Deficiency gapes every side!
" The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
" See the enwrapping rocky niche,
" Sufficient for the sleep, in which
" The lizard breathes for ages safe:
" Split the mould—and as this would chafe
" The creature's new world-widened sense,
" One minute after you dispense
" The thousand sounds and sights that broke
" In, on him, at the chisel's stroke,—
" So, in God's eyes, the earth's first stuff
" Was, neither more nor less, enough
" To house man's soul, man's need fulfil.

" You reckoned it immeasurable:

" So thinks the lizard of his vault!

" Could God be taken in default,

" Short of contrivances, by you,—

" Or reached, ere ready to pursue

" His progress through eternity?

" That chambered rock, the lizard's world,

" Your easy mallet's blow has hurled

" To nothingness for ever; so,

" Has God abolished at a blow

" This world, wherein his saints were pent,—

" Who, though, found grateful and content,

" With the provision there, as thou,

" Yet knew He would not disallow

" Their spirits' hunger, felt as well,—

" Unsated,—not unsatable,

" As Paradise gives proof. Deride

" Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside!"

XXVII.

I cried in anguish, 'Mind, the mind,
'So miserably cast behind,
'To gain what had been wisely lost!
'Oh, let me strive to make the most
'Of the poor stinted soul, I nipped
'Of budding wings, else well equipt
'For voyage from summer isle to isle!
'And though she needs must reconcile
'Ambition to the life on ground,
'Still, I can profit by late found
'But precious knowledge. Mind is best—
'I will seize mind, forego the rest
'And try how far my tethered strength
'May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
'—Let me, since I can fly no more,
'At least spin dervish-like about

'(Till giddy rapture almost doubt
'I fly) through circling sciences,
'Philosophies and histories!
'Should the whirl slacken there, then Verse,
'Fining to music, shall asperse
'Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain
'Intoxicate, half-break my chain!
'Not joyless, though more favoured feet
'Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
'The floor? At least earth's bond is broke!'

XXVIII.

Then, (sickening even while I spoke)
'Let me alone! No answer, pray,
'To this! I know what Thou wilt say!
'All still is earth's,—to Know, as much
'As Feel its truths, which if we touch
'With sense or apprehend in soul,

'What matter? I have reached the goal—
'"Whereto does Knowledge serve!" will burn
'My eyes, too sure, at every turn!
'I cannot look back now, nor stake
'Bliss on the race, for running's sake.
'The goal's a ruin like the rest!'—
—"And so much worse thy latter quest,
(Added the Voice) "that even on earth
"Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
"Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
"That pull the more into the less,
"Making the finite comprehend
"Infinity, the bard would spend
"Such praise alone, upon his craft,
"As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,
"Goes to the craftsman who arranged
"The seven strings, changed them and rechanged—
"Knowing it was the South that harped.

" He felt his song, in singing, warped,
" Distinguished his and God's part: whence
" A world of spirit as of sense
" Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
" Which he could traverse, not remain
" A guest in:—else were permanent
" Heaven upon earth, its gleams were meant
" To sting with hunger for the light,—
" Made visible in Verse, despite
" The veiling weakness,—truth by means
" Of fable, showing while it screens,—
" Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
" Was ever fable on outside.
" Such gleams made bright the earth an age;
" Now, the whole sun 's his heritage!
" Take up thy world, it is allowed,
" Thou who hast entered in the cloud!"

XXIX.

Then I—'Behold, my spirit bleeds,
'Catches no more at broken reeds,—
'But lilies flower those reeds above—
'I let the world go, and take love!
'Love survives in me, albeit those
'I loved are henceforth masks and shows,
'Not loving men and women: still
'I mind how love repaired all ill,
'Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends
'With parents, brothers, children, friends!
'Some semblance of a woman yet
'With eyes to help me to forget,
'Shall live with me; and I will match
'Departed love with love, attach
'Its fragments to my whole, nor scorn
'The poorest of the grains of corn

'I save from shipwreck on this isle,
'Trusting its barrenness may smile
'With happy foodful green one day,
'More precious for the pains. I pray,
'For love, then, only!'

XXX.

At the word,
The Form, I looked to have been stirred
With pity and approval, rose
O'er me, as when the headsman throws
Axe over shoulder to make end—
I fell prone, letting Him expend
His wrath, while, thus, the inflicting Voice
Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?
"Love is the best? 'Tis somewhat late!
"And all thou dost enumerate
"Of power and beauty in the world,

" The mightiness of love was curled
" Inextricably round about.
" Love lay within it and without,
" To clasp thee,—but in vain! Thy soul
" Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
" Still set deliberate aside
" His love!—Now take love! Well betide
" Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
" The show of love for the name's sake,
" Remembering every moment Who
" Beside creating thee unto
" These ends, and these for thee, was said
" To undergo death in thy stead
" In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
" What doubt in thee could countervail
" Belief in it? Upon the ground
" ' That in the story had been found
" ' Too much love? How could God love *so?*

" He who in all his works below
" Adapted to the needs of man,
" Made love the basis of the plan,—
" *Did* love, as was demonstrated:
" While man, who was so fit instead,
" To hate, as every day gave proof,—
" You thought man, for his kind's behoof,
" Both could and would invent that scheme
" Of perfect love—'twould well beseem
" Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
" Not tally with God's usual ways!"

XXXI.

And I cowered deprecatingly—
'Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
'Or grant what shall seem Heaven almost!
'Let me not know that all is lost,
'Though lost it be—leave me not tied

'To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
'Let that old life seem mine—no more—
'With limitation as before,
'With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
'Be all the earth a wilderness!
'Only let me go on, go on,
'Still hoping ever and anon
'To reach one eve the Better Land!'

XXXII.

Then did the Form expand, expand—
I knew Him through the dread disguise,
As the whole God within his eyes
Embraced me.

XXXIII.

When I lived again,
The day was breaking,—the grey plain

I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision? False or true?
Since then, three varied years are spent,
And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream—be sure
A mere dream and distemperature—
The last day's watching: then the night,—
The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God she still each method tries

To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows, the fiend in angel's shape!
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, 'How dreadful to be grudged
'No ease henceforth, as one that's judged,
'Condemned to earth for ever, shut
'From Heaven'. .
But Easter-Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every way
Is infinite,—and who can say?

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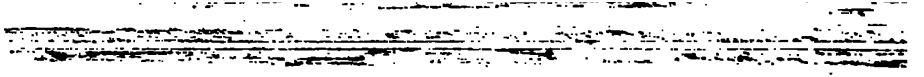

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